

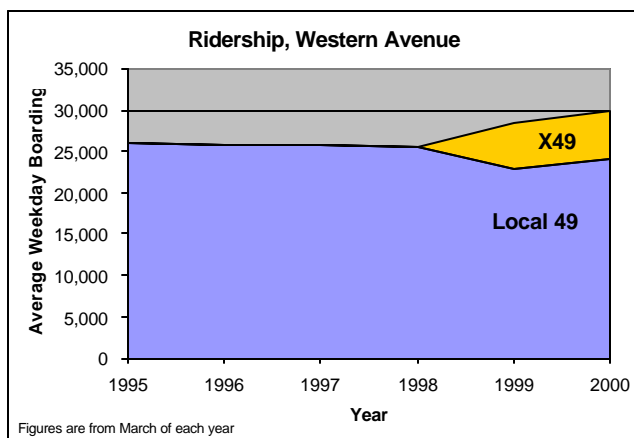
Starting in December, 1998, CTA began operation of the X49 Western Express rapid bus service. The X49 is a limited-stop express service that spans 18 miles across the city of Chicago, with stops spaced roughly every one-half mile. The limited stops allows the X49 to operate at speeds 25% faster than the parallel local service, which stops every 1/8<sup>th</sup> mile.

The Western Express makes connections with 5 CTA rail lines, one Metra commuter rail line and 40 other bus routes. This placement within CTA's network provides one-transfer service to such destinations as downtown Chicago and the Chicago lakefront, O'Hare and Midway airports, five universities, Chicago's convention centers, all of Chicago's professional sports arenas, and three dozen commuter rail stations in 14 suburbs.



The Western Express runs Monday through Friday, except holidays, 6am to 7pm. Service frequency is 15 minutes in the rush hour and 20 minutes during other times.

The X49 Western Express parallels the local #49 Western bus, which operates on frequency of 6-8 minute during rush hour and 10 minutes off-peak. There are roughly 2 local buses for every one express bus.



### Ridership Gains

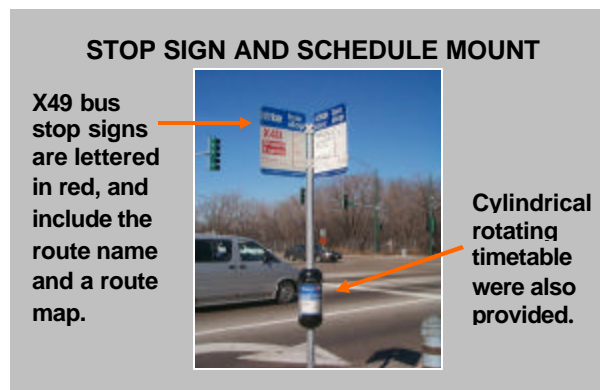
So far, the Western Express has successfully attracted riders to CTA. 5,700 rides are taken on the #X49 each weekday (March, 2000). As the graph to the left shows, the #X49 initially attracted some riders from the local bus, but the overall corridor has seen a large increase in ridership. The latest figures show that 4,400 more rides are taken within the

corridor since the start of the Express service in 1998; this is an increase of over 17%.

Both the local and Express have seen a progressive increase in ridership since the start of the Western Express. These gains appear to be leveling off in early 2000.

## Marketing and Image

Upon start-up of the X49, newspaper advertisements were placed in selected papers, as well as posters in CTA rail station, rail vehicles and buses. In order to help promote the service as a rapid transit-*like* operation, CTA created vehicle car-cards and public flyers that used a design style similar to that used on CTA's rail system, as shown in the following graphic.



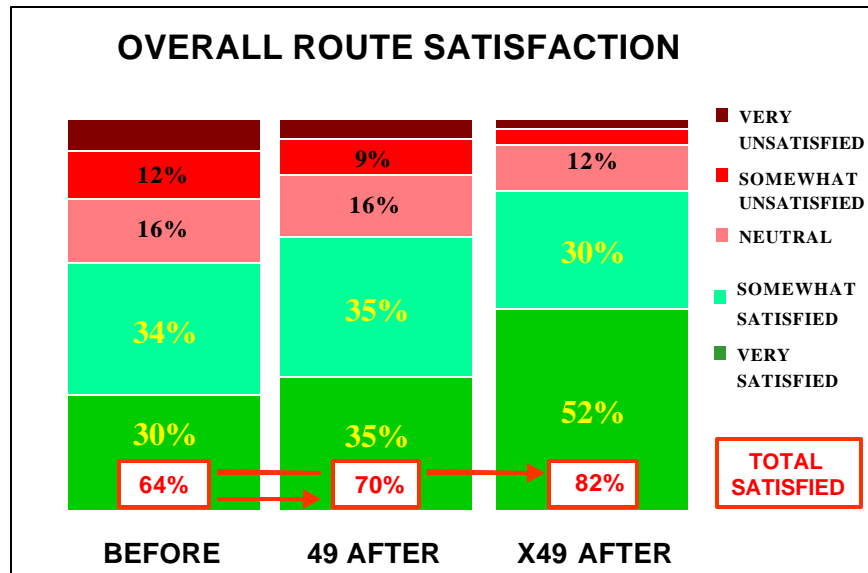
In an attempt to distinguish the X49 on the street from other services, especially the parallel local service, CTA tested with a couple of visual techniques. For one, the express signage has a pronounced red color scheme. In addition, rapid transit-*like* maps and timetables have been made available at every Western Express bus stop.

Bus wrapping was not available for this operation, but in an attempt to distinguish the vehicles on the street, the electronic destination signs were reprogrammed to have black lettering on yellow background, which is different than most CTA buses, which have yellow lettering on a black background. This reversal gives waiting customers a visual cue that an approaching bus is in fact their bus.



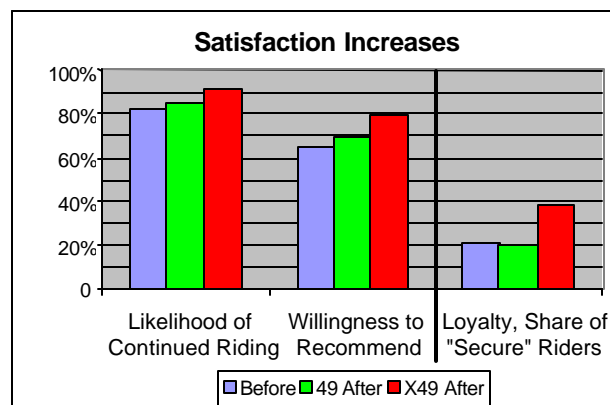
## Customer Satisfaction Increases

In order to assess the impact of the X49 on customer's behavior, satisfaction and loyalty, CTA performed Customer Satisfaction surveys within the Western Avenue corridor *before* and *after* implementation. The results were very promising. The new service increased overall route satisfaction for riders of *both* the express *and* local buses. A very high 82% of all Western Express riders expressed satisfaction with their new service!



Importantly, when asked about specific service attributes, customers responded most favorably towards those elements that the X49 was meant to impact, that is: on-time performance, passenger wait time, route dependability and travel time. These changes were most significant for Western Express riders, but were also found to be true, to a lesser degree, for local riders. In other words, the perceived benefits of the express service have spilled-over to the nearby services.

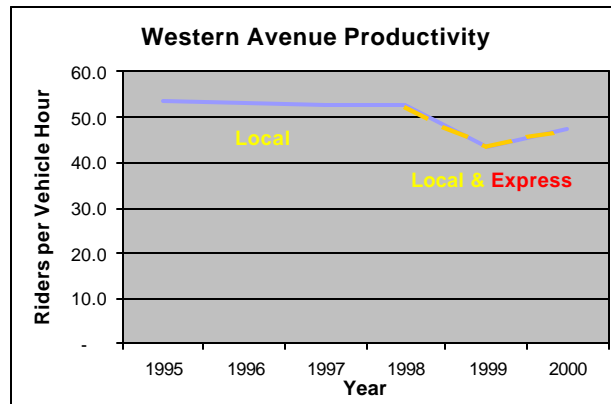
Other determinations of satisfaction also increased for the X49 customers. Riders increased their "likelihood of riding again" and "willingness to recommend the service to others." The increase in those two ratings and the overall satisfaction levels have led to an increase in the corridor's share of loyal and "secure" riders, who have nearly doubled on the X49 Western Express.



## Productivity

Despite the boost in ridership and customer satisfaction from the Western Express, CTA staff is still responsible to insure that the cost of the new service is justifiable within established service standards and productivity goals. For the Western Express, the goal is to bring the entire corridor's productivity to its pre-implementation levels.

The Western Express was implemented without any immediate alterations to the underlying local bus service, and despite the ridership gains, productivity has slipped within the corridor. In late 1999, service levels on the local Western Avenue route were slightly altered to better meet the new demand, but further increases in productivity are needed. To meet the target, further marketing and promotion will be pursued to fill-in the excess capacity, otherwise more service adjustments will be needed.



## Future Plans

CTA is committed towards improving the quality of service and operational performance of the Western Express. Funding from the Federal CMAQ program has been earmarked for bus stop improvements at X49 bus stops. Improved customer amenities, like shelter, seating and signage will be pursued within the program, including preliminary technical work for a future installation of electronic customer information signs at selected stops.

In addition, CTA is seeking local funds to conduct studies and technical analyses of problem intersections along Western Avenue, in the desire to come up with architectural and engineering solutions that will improve traffic flow, vehicular movement and passenger access that is friendly and safe.

This project will be coordinated with ongoing studies that will eventually lead to the implementation of AVL and traffic signal prioritization along Western Avenue.

Lastly, CTA has preliminary plans to use the success of the Western Express as justification to implement two more limited-stop express services in Chicago by early 2001.

### Contact, CTA's Western Express

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